

Twitter, SEDA and the November 2011 Conference

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Twitter, SEDA and the November 2011 Conference

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What is Twitter?

Twitter is a micro-blogging tool which allows the user to 'tweet' a message using up to 140 characters. Initially critics dismissed Twitter for its banal conversations, but the reality is that Twitter has been appropriated in many other ways. Tweeters are sharing links, breaking news, organising events and much more. The ability to write a succinct message which catches the interest of followers is the key. The introduction of url shorteners such as bit.ly and goo.gl that also provide analytics on click-throughs (and the automation of shortened links within Twitter itself) has meant that users can include a link to relevant websites, videos, podcasts and images, without using too many precious characters. Followers can choose to 'retweet' messages, cascading information on to an ever growing audience, reply with a comment, or save a tweet as a favourite. The use of the hashtag # symbol before relevant keywords allows tweets to be categorised and searchable.

So what is the relationship between Twitter and SEDA?

Hashtags are now frequently used at conferences. At the SEDA conferences in November 2010 and May 2011 only a few people were sending tweets. While some were frequent users, others commented that they were new to this and had never realised such conversations were going on about learning and teaching development. But at this November's conference, a very different picture emerged.

The Twitter username for SEDA is @Seda_UK_ and the conference was given the hashtag '#sedaconf16'. Between 14 November and 1 December, 1339 tweets using #sedaconf16 were posted by 117 unique Tweeters – a huge increase. SEDA sent 126 tweets promoting and commenting on sessions. A total of 579 tweets were retweeted. 446 tweets included links to associated information, some including photos taken at the event. Some tweeted about just joining Twitter as a result of attending the session on 'using social media to develop a personal learning network' (Beckingham and Walker, 2011). Another on how she had 'now found lots of new Ed Dev tweeters to follow'. What was interesting was the number of people engaging in the dialogue who were not actually present at the conference. One tweeted 'some interesting workshops and sessions at #sedaconf16, would be interested in a couple of them, first I'd heard of conference today'.

The value of Twitter as a social communication tool for the SEDA community is vast. It enables users to build a web of connections with people they may never have had the opportunity to meet and to mutually benefit from the experiences of professionals beyond their immediate network. With over 100 million active users, Twitter should not be dismissed as a fad.

SEDA News

Congratulations to Emma Dawson on being awarded the Supporting Educational Change Certificate.

SEDA has been awarded a £10,000 JISC grant for work on embedding digital literacies. The report on the previous JISC grant on embedding IT is at tinyurl.com/84h9hgp.

SEDA has responded to the Government White Paper on Higher Education (tinyurl.com/7dluc49).

Forthcoming Events

SEDA Workshop – Learner Engagement: A Guide to Work-based Learning

11 January 2012, Woburn House, London

SEDA Spring Teaching Learning and Assessment Conference 2012

17 May 2012, Queen Hotel, Chester

New Publications (£12)

Working with Cultural Diversity in Higher Education

Edited by Monika Foster (SEDA Special 28)

Learner Engagement: A Guide to Negotiated Work-Based Learning

Mike Laycock (SEDA Special 29)

Developing Reflective Practice with Early Career Academics

Edited by Louisa Sheward and Marian Renshaw (SEDA Special 30)

Getting started

A good starting place is @Seda_UK_, then follow some of its 800 followers. By developing your personal learning network and connections, you will soon find valuable online dialogues taking place.

There is a degree of serendipity with Twitter – you will have to accept you will never be able to read every tweet. The continual flowing stream can be overwhelming as you increase the number of people you follow. However as Shirky (2008) argues, 'It's not information overload, it's filter failure'; there are mechanisms to organise and filter the vast amounts of information. Whilst there are now numerous resources available to help you with this, remember you can always send a tweet asking for advice.

References

Beckingham, S. and Walker, D. (2011) 'Using social media to develop your own personal learning network' (tinyurl.com/c5ynd02).

Shirky, C. (2008) 'It's not information overload. It's filter failure', paper presented at Web 2.0 Expo, New York, September 16-19.

Twitter (2011) (tinyurl.com/3dlt7r7).

Sue Beckingham is an Educational Developer at Sheffield Hallam University and can be found on Twitter as @suebecks.